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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN REGION

SUMMARY

The present document reports on and analyses major new trends and developments in UNICEF programme cooperation in the Americas and Caribbean region during 1993.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibility for cooperation in the following countries and territories: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uruguay and Venezuela.

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I. THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

1. It is estimated that there are 192 million persons living in absolute poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean. This represents an increase of over 80 million in the last two decades and accounts for 46 per cent of the total population. Although the incidence of poverty is greater in rural areas, where 60 per cent of the people are poor, the vast majority of poor (115 million) are in urban areas. The economic adjustments made during the 1980s, which placed more emphasis on spending cuts than on increases in public revenues, produced massive lay-offs, lower wages for public employees and a reduction in public investment. Likewise, informal sector employment and underemployment increased, as did labour instability and partial employment. A World Bank study covering nine countries found that per capita expenditure on health, education and social security fell in all countries.

2. Despite the economic crisis, there have been improvements over the last 30 years in reducing child mortality, increasing life expectancy, providing schooling for children and young people and increasing literacy rates and access to water supply and sanitation. This resulted from several factors: a higher level of education of women; a drop in the fertility rate; a higher level of urbanization; and the more widespread use of immunization, oral rehydration therapy (ORT) and breast-feeding. Yet, cutbacks in economic and social investment have had a serious impact on the quality of social services. A growing percentage of young persons neither study nor work. Women have joined the labour force under discriminatory conditions and, in most cases, female heads of household are plagued by high unemployment and low wages. These circumstances frequently include processes that accelerate environmental degradation. Growing urban and international migration and increased delinquency, particularly in urban areas, are common.

II. CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

3. All the Latin American and Caribbean countries, with the exception of Antigua and Barbuda and Haiti, have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have created a mechanism to incorporate the principles of the Convention into national legislation, including national programmes of action, to enhance respect for the rights of children. The main impact of the Convention can be measured in terms of the adoption of its principles into the design and formulation of child welfare policies and programmes.

III. DECADE GOALS AND STRATEGIES

4. The most recent estimates show that in order to achieve the mid-decade goals, Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua and Panama must reduce their infant and under-five mortality rates at a much faster pace than in the past decade. Persistent high-to-moderate infant and under-five mortality rates are caused by the cumulative effects of malnutrition; poor access to health services, safe drinking water and sanitation; poor quality of education; and growing poverty. During a meeting held at Santa Fe de Bogota, Colombia, in April 1993, it was concluded that to achieve the mid-decade goals it was

necessary to improve the quality of services, enhance the mobilization of financial resources and strengthen the technical capacity of local governments. Once basic survival is assured for the most vulnerable groups, the issue of income and resource redistribution will be crucial to continued progress. Significant investment in health and education will be needed to achieve further gains in quality of life and, thus, in productivity and economic growth.

A. Health and nutrition

5. With respect to the expanded programme on immunization, at an inter-ministerial meeting 37 health ministers from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa analysed the immunization programme of Mexico in promoting social mobilization, as well as the use of ORT and the control of acute respiratory infections as a complement to ongoing efforts to improve basic health services at the country level. The modernization of health systems in Argentina, Chile, Colombia and the Dominican Republic - supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank - will enhance sustainability and progress made in achievement of the goals.

6. It is considered feasible in almost every country of the region to reduce the incidence of neonatal tetanus and eradicate measles. All countries, with the exception of Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela, have conducted measles vaccination campaigns for children between nine months and 14 years of age. Since the last case of poliomyelitis was reported on 5 September 1991, in Peru, most countries have eradicated the disease.

7. With respect to vitamin A deficiency, all countries of the region carried out campaigns providing megadosages of the needed vitamin. The incidence of blindness and other symptoms of vitamin A deficiency is decreasing in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Panama. Sugar is being fortified in Chile, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, and a flour fortification strategy has been adopted in Venezuela. Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica and Uruguay have virtually eliminated the commercialization of non-iodized salt, and Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay and Venezuela will achieve that goal by 1994. The Andean region has highly successful, well-designed and efficient programmes to eliminate iodine deficiency disorders. However, additional efforts are required in Guatemala, Haiti and Peru where infrastructures and support have declined since the 1970s. Twenty countries, including Brazil and Mexico, have problems with goitre. An interregional, ministerial-level meeting, to be convened by the President of Ecuador and sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and UNICEF, will take place at Quito in April 1994 to share experiences and define a plan of action to achieve universal salt iodization.

8. Good ORT coverage has been achieved in Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela; in Mexico, the rate of coverage rose from 30 to 84 per cent in three years and is expected to reach 90 per cent by 1995. The greatest efforts are needed in Guatemala, Haiti and Peru, where additional financial resources are required. Mass awareness created by the cholera epidemic contributed greatly to improvements in diarrhoea control. It is

estimated that for each death due to cholera, 10 persons were subsequently spared death due to diarrhoea. Today, the fatality rate has dropped below 1 per cent, especially in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru. Local production of oral rehydration salts is on the rise, but it has yet to equal national demand and should be complemented by the use of home-made liquids.

9. The goal to end free distribution of milk substitutes at all maternity hospitals and service centres is likely to be achieved shortly in Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay and the countries of Central America, with others to follow by 1995. In almost every country, legislation banning free or low-cost distribution of infant formula and milk substitutes is being promoted, and the creation of national committees to certify and monitor baby- and mother-friendly hospitals is being enccuraged.

10. Some countries have lowered the incidence of moderate and severe malnutrition by as much as 50 per cent. This is due to better health services, access to safe water supply and sanitation and education of women. Yet, the accumulated effects of skewed income distribution on the poorest means that the region has 7 million children under five years of age who are malnourished and 13 million with low height-for-age. In Cuba it is estimated that 68 per cent of the under-five mortality rate is related to malnutrition, despite excellent health and education coverage. This is evidence of the deterioration in the food supply of the country. Growth monitoring has been initiated in schools in Argentina and Chile.

B. Education

11. In spite of progress achieved in the region in access to and coverage of primary education, the lack of quality and efficiency of the primary school system remains a problem. The main obstacle to achieving the goal of universal primary education, at a cost of $2.5 billion each year, is that nearly 20 million schoolchildren repeat school years. UNICEF country programmes are providing a stronger and sharper focus on primary education. More than $1.5 million has been allocated to the region from global funds for education. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Peru are increasing attention to primary education, focusing on repetition and drop-out rates. Capacity-building to improve the design of textbooks for children and self-instructional materials is being promoted. Technical cooperation among developing countries has been supported to share country experiences, for example, the success of the New School in Colombia, an example of flexible, democratic multi-grade education. Brazil has made significant efforts to achieve universal primary education, with districts in Ceara State leading the country in coverage. Bilingual education is being instituted in Bolivia and Ecuador, and the Initiation School Centres in Honduras are also successful.

C. Water supply and sanitation

12. In order to achieve universal access to water and basic sanitation by the year 2000, water must be supplied to an additional 176 million inhabitants, and basic sanitation to an additional 221 million. Agreements to join efforts to achieve water supply and sanitation goals were made during a meeting held in Cuba in November 1992, organized by the Association of Water and Sanitation Engineers, with support from UNICEF and PAHO. UNICEF is supporting water supply and sanitation projects in Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Suriname. During 1993, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Cuba began to implement projects in this field.

D. Women in development

13. Important progress has been made on legislation, in research on the girl child and in gender training. The Andean Parliament has dealt with issues regarding women and the girl child during special and regular sessions and has committed itself to the recognition of women's rights. The Central American Parliament held a forum on the legal problems of women, which will have great influence on national legislation. The Network of Governmental Women's Bureaux gained special importance when it was recognized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and 11 agencies of the United Nations system as the most appropriate vehicle to support ECLAC in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held at Beijing in 1995. Eight countries were involved in the "Research on Use of Time by Boys and Girls Aged 7-14 in the Frame of the Convention of the Rights of the Child", to be published in 1994.

IV. EMERGENCIES

14. The crisis of the past two years in Haiti has seen an immeasurable deterioration in the situation of children and other vulnerable groups. There are strong signs that the country, which in 1991 was already ranked the worst of the region in key indicators of child welfare, is today further from achieving the goals for the 1990s than it was on the day the World Summit for Children Declaration was signed.

15. Other emergencies have affected Cuba, Honduras and Nicaragua. In September, tropical storms and flooding affected northern Honduras and the Atlantic coastal area of Nicaragua. In Honduras, the number of victims was estimated at 40,000. National emergency committees, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, distributed relief supplies to the affected population, using stocks intended for regular food supply programmes. Emergency grants allocated to both countries were insufficient to meet emergency needs and contributions are therefore still being sought.

V. COOPERATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

A. Cooperation with the United Nations

16. Agreements have been signed with various organizations. Work has begun with ECLAC on studies and regional publications on the family and on the efficiency of social investment in children, among other topics. UNICEF and the Latin American Institute for Economic and Social Planning organized the International Seminar on Children and Municipalities, held at Asuncion, to reinforce action programmes for children at the municipal level. In conjunction with the Latin American Demographic Centre, UNICEF produced a series of publications containing a database on child mortality since 1960. With the cooperation of the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, work is being completed on the situation of female heads of household and girls in the labour market (specifically those belonging to vulnerable sectors), the impact of economic and social policy on family well-being and programme proposals to protect vulnerable groups. UNICEF is also collaborating with UNDP regional projects on "Human Development and Poverty" and "Governability and Human Development", including proposals on children and democracy. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has recently joined PAHO, the United Nations Population Fund, IDB, the United States Agency for International Development and UNICEF in the Inter-agency Coordination Committee for monitoring the World Summit for Children.

B. Regional forums and the World Summit for Social Development

17. UNICEF provided technical and financial support to the Government of Brazil to prepare for the Third Ibero-American Summit at Salvador, Brazil, in July 1993, which resulted in the full endorsement by heads of State of the mid-decade goals. Similar assistance was supplied to the Pro-Tempore Secretariat of the Rio Group for preparation of background documentation on the World Summit for Social Development. UNICEF participated in the Conference on Development and Poverty organized by the Government of Mexico at Oaxaca, Mexico, in September 1993 in preparation for the World Summit for Social Development, where the importance of national programmes of action was discussed. UNICEF also helped ECLAC and the Government of Colombia to organize the Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean at Cartagena, Colombia, in preparation for the International Year of the Family. Work with the Central American Parliament, the Andean Parliament and the Latin American Parliament has continued with concrete programmes of cooperation, especially in the areas of legislation regarding women and dissemination of Facts for Life messages.

C. Cooperation with the Catholic Church

18. The Latin American Conference of Catholic Bishops (CELAM) has supported the Children's Pastorate Programme being implemented in 13 countries of the region. The programme has been extended to 75 per cent of the ecclesiastical districts in these countries. Approximately 200,000 trained pastoral agents work as volunteers with nearly 2 million families on topics related to children. With UNICEF assistance, CELAM prepared a module and several radio scripts featuring

concisely phrased, basic messages on child development to educate families. These modules will also be used as an input for a communication strategy to be developed in 1994 with regional communication and information networks of the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations. Contact was established with Faith and Joy, a Catholic organization that operates a number of schools throughout Latin America. Possibilities for innovative projects in the field of primary education appear to be good.

D. Mayors as defenders of children

19. The 34 mayors from the region who attended the Second World Colloquium of Mayors held at Mexico City in July 1993 are promoting the formation of a network of Latin American mayors to implement agreements reached during the conference. A group was appointed to coordinate the formation of the network and to promote local leadership and national programmes of action at the local level. This group held its first meeting in early November 1993, convened by the mayor of Quito. Recommendations were adopted calling for the design and development of municipal action programmes for children, exchange of experiences and training.

VI. EVALUATIONS

20. In response to Executive Board decision 1993/5 (E/ICEF/1993/14) on the UNICEF evaluation process, the regional office selected a sample of 33 evaluations and studies from among those sent by field offices. Seven project evaluations were also analysed. Four sectoral reports on evaluation practices for women in development, health and nutrition, urban basic services and the programme for the Andean region-Bolivia were prepared. The general conclusion was that although important progress had been achieved with respect to evaluation activities, certain deficiencies persisted. Precise policies have yet to be established outlining methodology, schedule, responsibilities, mechanisms and potential uses. The lack of standardization in the 40 evaluations is a clear indication that criteria on general orientation are still lacking. Moreover, general indicators must be established to measure project processes and their impact.

21. In an effort to support initiatives to monitor country progress in the implementation of the mid-decade goals, the regional office has been promoting (a) the establishment of regional networks for horizontal cooperation on monitoring and evaluation, financing of national programmes of action and decentralization of national programmes of action and social policies; and (b) a regional training workshop, to be held in March, to deal with monitoring, financing and decentralization issues, which will be followed by a second national programme of action evaluation meeting of ministers, to be convened by the President of Colombia. Preparations are being made for a study on nutrition trends in the region, which will make it possible to identify the main nutritional deficiencies and necessary areas of intervention. Furthermore, a study on the impact of the use of iron pots on the prevalence of anaemia will contribute to the introduction of a simple and cost-efficient means of reducing iron deficiency in the region. A study on the "myths" about child labour will enable the regional office to contribute to defining policies and strategies for

working children, a priority established by the Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child chaired by UNICEF.